

# Demonology with Dr. Alyssa Beall

## Ologies Podcast

### October 22, 2019

Oh hey. It's that guy that asked to pet your dog but doesn't realize how much you wanna talk to him about your dog's likes, and dislikes, and hopes, and dreams, Alie Ward, back with another spooooooky episode of *Ologies*. So, I've been dishin' up a whole month of darkish, pumpkiny topics, and if you've missed out this October, y'all, there are episodes on skeletons, we talk about body farms, we got one on spiderwebs, one on pumpkins that'll warm your whole heart, and now this one is just right on the nose: demons. Evil spirits. Creepy, mean beings. Let's get into it.

But before we do, a few business items up top. Number one, if you're in L.A. and you're hearing this before Friday, October 25th, come hang out in a park and learn about squids with me and Sarah McAnulty, who is our squid expert Teuthologist. Silver Lake Meadow, 6:30 pm, Friday, October 25th, free. We're just gonna be hanging out in a park talking about science. There's an Eventbrite link in the show notes with more info.

Also, Happy Birthday to Fancy Nancy, aka my mom, who taught you how to fall asleep better. We all love you, Fancy Nancy. Also, thank you to everyone supporting the podcast on [Patreon.com/Ologies](https://patreon.com/Ologies) and submitting your questions. Thank you to everyone wearing *Ologies* merch and tagging your photos with #OlogiesMerch. Thanks to everyone making sure that you're subscribed, and rating the podcast, and telling friends, and of course the folks leaving reviews. You know that I read them so that I can pick a freshy every week, such as for example Eggsy1089 who says:

*Crushed Nana's dinner convo. Today I wowed my fam with so much spiderweb knowledge and pitched the podcast so hard. I told them they can all expect Ologies merch for Christmas. Thank you for inspiring me to slow my life down and take genuine interest in things I never thought I would. This podcast is pure gold.*

Eggsy1089, thank you. Thank your Nana for me.

Okay, let's descend into the bowels of human culture and consciousness around the darkest corners of fear and trickery and delve into demons, which comes, by the way, from a root meaning 'a lesser spirit', which comes from an earlier root meaning 'to divide'. And yes, demonology is a thing.

This Ologist and I agreed to meet remotely at an ungodly hour of 7 am. We hopped on the phone, we each recorded our audio, so the sound might be just a wee bit different than usual. Just attribute it to a demon, it's fine.

So, this Ologist got a Bachelor's in Religious Studies, a Master's in Theology and Religion, and a PhD in Religion with a thesis about the neopagan internet community, and is now an assistant professor in Religious Studies at West Virginia University. She teaches courses on the history of witches, and demons hunts, and fear, and historical heresy.

So, we hopped on the phone. We gabbed about ghosts, and gargoyles, and possessions, and myths, and horror films, and psychology, and Halloween costumes, and cross-cultural spookiness, and dear old demons, and devils. So, light a candle and watch your back for the historical wisdom of Religious Studies professor and Demonologist, Dr. Alyssa Beall.

-----

**Alie Ward:** So, you are a demonologist.

**Dr. Alyssa Beall:** Yes, sort of. I study people who study demons. How's that? I don't study the demons themselves.

**Alie:** *[laughs]* I think it explains why it's hard to find an actual demonologist who is perhaps credible in their field, I think.

**Alyssa:** Right. Like a practicing demonologist might be difficult, yeah.

**Alie:** There's, like, one out there, and her Twitter account was suspended for unknown reasons and I was like, "I don't think there's a lot of them."

**Alyssa:** Oh dear. No.

**Alie:** But how long have you studied people who study demons?

**Alyssa:** About 20 years now, I guess. It started when I was in grad school. I got very interested in just the concept of magic and witchcraft, historically, a lot of Inquisition-era stuff. And it sort of went from there. I started teaching a class on magic and witchcraft, which people also thought was sort of a practicum. They thought they were going to learn spells. They were very disappointed when they found out they weren't. So yeah, about 20 years, back at Syracuse, I started studying it.

**Alie:** What got you into it before it became academic? What kind of a kid were you?

**Alyssa:** Oh, crazy. Yeah, absolutely. I tell a story all the time. One of my friends remembers this. I got in trouble on the playground because I told some of the other kids in grade school that I was talking to Athena. And I wasn't, let's make that clear. But I was pretending that I was, and they got a little nervous about that.

**Aside:** So, Alyssa's parents were avid travelers and she developed an appetite for world history and religion pretty early. So, while your thing as a kid may have been micromachines or hopping a Skip-It in a driveway, Dr. Beall's thing was Ancient Greece. And apparently her school administrators did not appreciate her tall tales about talking to ancient deities.

**Alie:** So, what happened when you got called into the principal's office for this?

**Alyssa:** I think at first, they were just trying to make sure that I didn't need medical advice. *[Alie laughs]* But they just basically told me to stop scaring the other kids and stop telling them that I was having conversations with ancient gods. So, I did. *["Ugh, fine."]*

**Alie:** What did your parents think of it? Were they like, "Hm, she's our kid. She's spooky."

**Alyssa:** Oh yeah. Yeah, they weren't terribly upset about it. They thought it was pretty funny actually at the time, so yeah. I was the kid who started playing D&D when she was, like, 10 or so. So that gives you some idea of my personality as a child, I think.

**Alie:** So, when it came to getting on an academic path, did you realize that you could do this as a job? Or what was your first intro into it, academically?

**Alyssa:** Oh gosh. I would say I had no idea what I was going to do. I actually started out in poli-sci and journalism. That was what I was going to college for. And I ended up taking a really horrible anthropology class on magic, *["This sucks."]* and I just sort of fell in love with the topic. And it was just one of those things where you find something out of the blue that you really, really enjoy and it sort of brings together all of the different things that you love. So, I had no clue I would end up here.

**Alie:** What exactly is a demon versus, like, a goblin, versus bad juju? Like, how is a demon even defined?

**Alyssa:** If you go all the way back, like into Ancient Greece, they're not necessarily evil. They're not spirits because they have form, but they're not necessarily evil creatures. So, have you ever read *The Golden Compass*?

**Alie:** No.

**Alyssa:** Oh, okay. It's this great fiction, great book. Sort of a kid's book, but it's a little bit higher end than that.

**Alie:** But it's about demons.

**Alyssa:** It's about demons, yes, and they're good for their people. They're sort of attached to people and they're very, very good creatures as long as the people are good. And demons are originally kind of like that. But when you get into monotheism, all of those kinds of creatures get turned into bad things.

**Alie:** So how far back do you think the notion of a spirit who was mischievous, who had form, how far back does that go? What are the first instances of that in writing or drawing?

**Alyssa:** Ooh. Um, wow. That's a big question.

**Alie:** Yeah, sorry.

**Alyssa:** Yeah, no, I'm sort of flipping through things in my head. Definitely Ancient Greece, and I would think in some forms Ancient Egypt as well. So that's about as far back as we can really get in some ways, textually at least.

**Aside:** So even before written history, demon idols were in effect, y'all. Like, they found an 11,000-year-old, mouth-agape human face carved in a plank of wood. A few gold prospectors discovered it in a Siberian peat bog. They thought it was a lot younger than it was, didn't really realize what a big deal it was and that it was worth more than its weight in the gold they were looking for. Oops. That's just a demon, screwing with your values.

So what kind of demons are we talking in ancient myths? You may have heard of Hades, for example. Now, how cute is it that the underworld was just called Hades after the guy whose house it was? Like, maybe once he had a cute neon bar sign that said [*slow and distorted like a demon voice*] "Chez Hades," but the top half shorted out and no one ever bothered to fix it, so they just called it Hades. "Hades' place". P.S. Hades wasn't a purely evil figure, though. Just kind of a dickish stepdad that no one liked.

But Alyssa explains that those kinds of demons aren't gods, and they're not sequestered in Hell. Mythological demons were a whole separate bag. They were considered to be up here among us, just kickin' it anywhere. And as a person whose shoe fell behind the x-ray machine at TSA this morning, so she just left it and ran in socks to her gate through LAX as her plane was boarding, hot damn, I'm starting to believe in demons.

**Alyssa:** No, I mean, I think it's more of an idea of beings in the normal world that are not quite gods and goddesses. So, some kind of, I have air quotes going on here, "spiritual beings," just sort of creatures in the normal world.

**Alie:** But they're not a person either?

**Alyssa:** Right. And they have some kinds of powers.

**Alie:** Why do you think that, as human beings, we need to come up with stories to explain good and evil? Do you think that demons are essentially just a product of trying to understand that we're shitty people? Or understand like, Freudian superego or ego?

**Alyssa:** I think they vary depending on, sort of, where you're at, and obviously the time period as well. So, demons today? Yeah, they're probably, oh gosh, manifestations of our issues and that kind of thing. So, we try to create these figures that embody the things that we're scared of. [*"Dying alone."*] But since they're not always evil historically, that question is sort of up in the air. It's really... I guess they could be manifestations of what people were afraid of, or what people wanted, or desired. But it's hard to tell because people in the past don't really talk about things like that.

So, it's our best guess in many ways why a lot of societies seem to create these things. And still today, not all of them are bad. If you go over to, for example, Thailand, they have these absolutely gorgeous, what we would think of as, demons. They have scary faces and they're very mean looking, but they're actually creatures that protect temples.

**Aside:** Okay, side note, I looked this up, and I believe she's talking about yaksha, which are nature spirits with demon faces. They kind of look like if a professional wrestler and a dragon had a love baby who dressed up as a circus clown for Halloween. Like, fierce, snarling, just exploding with bright colors and makeup, but also bearing kind of surprised expressions, like, "Holy shit, what are you doing here?" That's kind of what their faces look like. So, yaksha can be beautiful though, and they can guard, or they can haunt places. So, they might protect you, or they might devour you. So, I guess, be nice to them. And I want them to know that the wrestler-clown-baby thing was like, very much a compliment.

**Alyssa:** They're not bad, but they look like it.

**Alie:** And can you walk me through, I know this is, essentially, distilling all of your work into like five or ten minutes, but just a tiptoe through the tulips of demons. Like what are some of your favorites in history? When did they rise and fall in popularity?

**Alyssa:** Because my period is so medieval, I guess those are kind of my favorite. The medieval demons are so classically what we would think of as demons. They've got big horns, and they're all muscly, and a lot of times they've got, like, six penises and that kind of stuff. So, they're just so classically demonic that you really have to love them. [*"Yeah, six."*] But I also do... I have a kind of affinity for the ones that I was just talking about in Thailand because, again, they're so over the top, and they are really, really beautiful. So, I'm sort of equally drawn to the super, super scary ones in medieval theology and the really, really pretty ones in Thai religion as well.

**Aside:** Okay, quick aside. So, demons, like people, and lamps, and probably butt plugs come in all shapes and sizes. Now, they might not be called demons, though. Us human persons, we got a lotta names for them. Like, pre-Babylonians called them shedu. In Islamic folklore, they're called jinns, or ifrits, or shayāṭīn. And the Japanese have these ogre-like oni. Jewish mythology's got shedim, Christianity has demons, fallen angels called Nephilim. Russian has chorts, and in Algonquian there's this tall, antlered, blood-hungry spirit called a wendigo. So, you got a culture, ya got demons.

Now, what about daemons, with the A-E? Daemons can be nice or they can be the name of a computer program. That's just a little techy factoid for you. Now, what about Damian? Does that name mean that you're evil? Nope. The name Damian means 'to tame', or 'to subdue'.

Also, for a little context, what was the Inquisition, you inquire? Well, there were a few Inquisition periods, one in the mid-1200s, and they used to torture people to try to find out who was talking shit about the Pope. Or later, in the 1500s, everyone was poking everyone else to see who was a demon or a witch to combat the rise of Protestantism. A lot of side-eye and suspicion in those days.

**Alie:** And now historically, was the Inquisition period... Was that, like, the hot time for demons? Did demons have kind of a boom then?

**Alyssa:** In the end period of it. It doesn't start out that way. That's what's sort of interesting. To summarize it briefly, it seems more like, at first, you're not supposed to believe them. As a practicing Christian at the time, it sort of goes against the power of God to believe that demons have power. And the same thing with witches. You're really not supposed to believe that witches are real in the beginning of the Inquisition. And then as it develops, it seems like they're almost trying to prove that God is real. It's this sort of period of skepticism, that everybody starts getting very nervous about proving whether or not God exists.

**Alie:** Oh wow.

**Alyssa:** Yeah. And to do that they have to, sort of, prove the supernatural, so they end up trying to prove that demons exist.

**Alie:** Oh my god.

**Alyssa:** So yeah. So, if demons exist, then God exists and everything's okay. [*clip from The Vampire Diaries: Damon, "We're all good here."*]

**Alie:** That is not what I expected at all.

**Alyssa:** Yeah, it's really fascinating to see how it develops, because when the Inquisition period starts, they're not going after witches. They're really going after what they would call heretics, people who believe differently from them. And it evolves into this whole actual witch hunt, but it doesn't start out that way. So, demons come in relatively late on the scene, so to speak.

**Alie:** And in terms of a timeline, when did monotheism really take root? When did we as a culture, when did certain cultures take on this idea that demons were the enemy of the one true God?

**Alyssa:** Probably around the time that Christianity really gains a hold in Rome. So, around the 300s.

**Aside:** Okay, quick virtual field trip. Alyssa told me that underneath the Vatican there's a huge necropolis where they used to store a whole army of dead people. And there's a stucco painting of Lucifer down there. Under the Vatican! Lucifer, of course, draws his name from a 'Bringer of Light', or the 'Son of Morning', named after a star falling from Heaven because Satan's origin story was that of an angel who rebelled and turned into that friend who's always trying to get you to have another drink, or order the chili cheese fries, or just delighting in the misery of others.

**Alyssa:** So, it starts developing, I would guess, early on like 100, 200 when they're trying to, sort of, win the battle of whose religion is going to take over this particular area. And so they really turn against the representations of those earlier gods and goddesses.

**Alie:** And so, in order to prove their faith to one God in the sky, it's like, "All these other jabronies, we don't believe in them anymore. That's yesterday's news."

**Alyssa:** Or they have to be bad, so instead of them being powerful and possibly good, they can sort of be powerful, but they have to be less powerful than God. So, then you get this whole demonic world.

**Alie:** And what properties does a demon usually have? What kind of mischief are we talking? Do they, like, give you cancer or do they just drop something in your food that sucks? Like, how bad are we talking?

**Alyssa:** I guess it could be that bad. Yeah, they could cause illness, that's for sure. There's one story, that I read in one text, that was something as simple as this priest blamed a demon for tripping him as he fell down the stairs. And that was his proof, that he had tripped and fallen down the stairs, and that was proof of demonic activity. So, it can be anything from really, really horrible, like killing babies. [*"The devil did it."*] You know, making them into stews, that's really popular during the medieval period. Or it can be as something as simple as tripping and falling down the stairs. So, they can have a lot of power, but they also can do really, really stupid stuff.

**Aside:** So, a few things a demon might do to you: sign your name on an insulting letter to someone you respect. Perhaps deposit their own giant bowel movement in your cat's litter box, causing you to take your pet to the veterinarian. Maybe affix a "Fuck Cops" sticker to your car's bumper. Just kidding, that's not the work of a demon. All three of those are just things that notorious prankster and lowkey comedic maniac, George Clooney, has done to his friends.

**Alyssa:** They weren't necessarily accusing the people of being demonic. They were accusing them of having interactions with demons, and that's where witches were supposed to get their power from. [*George Clooney: "I'm doing one now that I can't tell you about. But in a year, you're going to hear that I've been arrested."*] So, witches were not powerful in and of themselves; they were powerful through the help of a demon. They often can't even be seen, the demons. So, the priests are trying to prove that they exist through the witches.

**Aside:** You know what they say, "Behind every great witch is a supportive, inspiring demon."

**Alie:** And do you think that back then there were a lot of, kind of, fables of demons that were made up to explain science that they just didn't get?

**Alyssa:** Yeah. Even things like crops failing, the harvest doesn't come in right, so you have to blame something. I think that's definitely an aspect of it, sure. Or again, like I just said, with the whole connection to babies. Obviously, there were a lot of really early infant deaths during the medieval period, and so people wanted to blame something for that happening. It's better than not knowing what's going on. Or it's better than thinking that *you* did something wrong, right? So, I do think in a lot of ways it was manifestations of people's fears. You can take that and use it yourself to blame those bad creatures for the bad stuff that's going on.

**Alie:** Do you think that still happens today?

**Alyssa:** Yeah. Um, definitely, [*both laugh*] yes. It seems that we create these sorts of things, sure. Even if it's in pop culture, which is a lot of what I also study. I'm really into horror movies even though I'm terrified of horror movies too. It takes me forever to get up the nerve to

watch one. But I love them. So, I think we still create these sorts of things in order to express those fears.

Even today in the U.S., we sort of turn towards certain types of creatures when we're afraid of certain things. So you know, vampires are popular for like five years, and then zombies are popular for five years, and then we switch over to witches for a while, and they all are expressions of different things that we're scared of.

**Alie:** Are they all a type of demon? Like when it comes to defining a demon, are there parameters in terms of what's a demon and what's not?

**Alyssa:** I mean, we would think of them today very differently. So, I assume that if somebody was going to define demonic activity, especially if you're within the church, it would have to have something to do with the figure of Satan. So, it's not anymore just some kind of evil creature. With the influx of Christianity, we really do have to have that kind of opposition to the one true God. If you think about things like exorcism movies, they definitely have to be able, today, to take control of a person. There's that whole possession aspect to it, and I would think that today that would be one of the main markers of what is demonic and what's not. [*"Possession is nine-tenths of the law, Pierce."*]

So, we've got things like ghosts, and witches, and that sort of stuff still in popular culture, but the demonic is something that can literally take over your body and not give it back. I think that's what people are so scared of. [*clip from The Exorcist: Pazuzu, "What an excellent day for an exorcism."*]

**Alie:** Did you ever watch *The Exorcist*, as a child or as an adult?

**Alyssa:** Oh yeah. Yeah. Yes.

**Alie:** [*vocally shudders*] Why is that the scariest movie? Like why is that... and *The Omen*. Why are those so terrifying?

**Alyssa:** Oh God, *The Omen* scared me even more actually. [*clip from The Omen, spooky Latin chanting*] It still does. It's still... *The Exorcist* isn't so scary when I show it to students now. Though I showed them *Exorcism of Emily Rose* the other day and a lot of them were really freaked out by that one. [*clip from The Exorcism of Emily Rose: Emily, "And I am Lucifer, the Devil in the fleshhhh."*] I do think that even if people aren't scared by other stuff, possession in particular still scares people a lot. So, I can talk through with my students, and we do, we talk about all of these things that people have feared in the past. Because at some point, vampires were considered to be absolutely real and people were really, really scared of them.

**Aside:** Side note, also scary? The plague. Just, infectious flea bites and wet coughs. Killed up to 200 million people in the mid-1300s. And what happens when everyone is dying and barfing blood and has bleeding mouth sores? Folks start thinking, "Well shit, vampires are real. What is a bacteria? Never heard of it. But vampires, that's just science."

**Alyssa:** But now that sounds silly to most people. Whereas you show them *The Exorcist* and they're really freaked out. So, I think it's that idea of loss of control of the body, loss of control of your mental facilities. All of that stuff is terrifying to people.

**Alie:** How do you feel when you see news items about current day exorcisms? How do you process that in terms of your skeptical brain, and your science brain, and your historical brain?

**Alyssa:** Yeah, I guess for me, anytime I'm studying religion, I do sort of go into this dual mode. So, I'm very much a skeptic and I'm very much into science. I mean, my brother's in aeronautics and aerospace, and you know, my family is really scientific and not religious at all. But I'm really interested in why these things come up in religions, too.

So, whereas my scientific brain is saying, "That can't possibly happen," my other side of my brain is saying, "Well, let's see what it looks like." So, I'm really interested when I hear those types of things, and obviously all over the world, whether it's a monotheistic culture or not, you get these concepts of possession. Sometimes they're good. Like in voodoo, possession is often a really positive thing because it's a way of communicating with the spirit world.

So, I'm interested in how that gets carried out in a culture; why being possessed might be good for somebody, but in our culture it's seen as the absolute worst thing that could possibly happen. At least in a Christian context.

**Alie:** I wonder too, how Christianity regards getting possessed by a good spirit. Like, Christianity seems A-Okay with getting knocked up by God.

**Alyssa:** Right, exactly.

**Alie:** But at the same time, like, "Demon, how dare you make me dance around and speak in gibberish?!"

**Alyssa:** Except when people speak in tongues. That's okay. So, the whole descent of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal Christian traditions, it *is* the influx of the Holy Spirit, and it can make you do things that you don't usually do. So, in some cases, in some denominations of Christianity, it's a positive thing to speak in tongues. [*clip from The Simpsons: Rod and Todd, speaking gibberish. Ned Flanders, "Speaking in tongues, what great kids."*] But then it's sort of the flip side of demonic possession that can make you speak languages that you don't know. I think that's still one of the proofs of possession, is that you speak in a language that you have never learned. So, it can go either way, even in Christianity.

**Aside:** I looked into this, and it's true. Some folks put a lot of pressure on themselves to speak in tongues. There's one ministry's website where I found an article that said:

*I felt like it was my fault, that I was doing something wrong, that something in me was broken. Finally, I just shut myself in my room and said, 'I'm not leaving this room until I speak in tongues. I'm not letting one word of English leave my mouth.' And I think that was my breakthrough.*

So, Rosetta Stone can't help you here, friends.

**Alie:** Have you ever looked into those studies and tried to figure out, "Okay, were these people just speaking gibberish or were they all of a sudden fluent in Portuguese and no one can explain it?"

**Alyssa:** Right. You get the stories that, yeah, it's fluency in stuff like Latin, or Ancient Greek, or something like that, that most people are never even exposed to. But you know, again, the skeptical side of me says, "Well, who's telling the story? What do they have to gain by having this out there?" Two sides of the coin, right? Does it actually happen or is there a compelling reason for somebody to be sharing this sort of story? And I don't know if I've ever seen scientifically convincing evidence of somebody talking a language that they have not learned.

**Alie:** Why do you think we need to be scared? Like, we're coming up on Halloween here. Why do we descend into, like, a month of let's be terrified, goblins, ghosts, spooks, spiders? Why do we need that?

**Alyssa:** It's really an outlet, isn't it? I mean, this is the same reason that I watch horror movies even though I get totally scared and I hate the feeling. And I'm one of those people that actually watches it from behind my fingers half the time.

**Alie:** Yeah, oh god, me too.

**Alyssa:** So, I don't know. When I'm done watching a horror movie, have I had some sort of emotional release or something? Maybe. And again, often I can't go to sleep the night that I watch a horror movie either, so that's kind of silly. But I think it is, it's some kind of emotional feeling that we get out of it that we really want. So, we want to be terrified because in some ways it actually feels good, I guess. And actually, I think it also engages a part of our brain that we might turn off a lot.

So, as I've been saying, this whole thing about me being skeptical, and I don't believe in ghosts, but at the same time, then why do I get absolutely terrified when I watch something like *Haunting of Hill House*? I do, I get really, really scared. But if I don't believe in ghosts, why am I getting that scared when I watch it? It doesn't actually make sense. So, I think it just gives us some kind of emotional release that we might be looking for.

**Aside:** There's more on this in the Fearology episode, but most experts echo that scary entertainment and horror hijacks our fight-or-flight response and pokes at our screaming almond of terror, the amygdala, which is deep in the brain. So, the rush of adrenaline that we would be using to run away from a bloodthirsty moose or a demon in a nightgown, instead gives some people an opioid-like rush. And then everything that goes bump in the night is kind of a little bump of brain chemicals.

**Alie:** When you're working, are you poring over old manuscripts? What kinds of writing are you looking at? And do you ever get freaked out while you're studying?

**Alyssa:** I do actually get a little bit freaked out by that. I just was writing on *Haunting of Hill House* and I had to watch the whole series again on *Netflix*. And I had to do it during the day, while my husband was home, with all the lights on. So, that stuff still does freak me out.

The ancient texts and the wood cuttings, they're really interesting, and they're really elaborate, especially when you get into depictions of demons and things like that. So, it's fascinating to see what the medieval brain was coming up with.

**Alie:** What was their thing with goats? Why goats and demons? Why is there such a crossover, stylistically?

**Alyssa:** Oh. I think it's the horns. I think it goes back to Pan in Ancient Greece. The depiction of the half-human half-goat, or at least the horned beings. I do think that comes in from a lot of the ancient Greco-Roman stuff again.

There was just an exhibit that we saw. We were on study abroad with students last summer and we took them to The Israel Museum, and they were doing an exhibit on Peter Pan, which sounds strange maybe, but they were actually tracing it all the way back to the Ancient Greco-Roman god Pan and then how that came forward.

So, all of these fairy tales and all of these depictions have their roots in that mythology still. So, we're constantly reusing the Greeks, as everybody has for thousands of years. So

now we're using them for these depictions of demons still, using their gods and goddesses.

**Aside:** So, for more on this, see the Mythology episode with John Bucher. It's just chock full of gossip about gods.

**Alie:** And what about how demonology is used in a way to alienate different groups of people, different religions? How has that been in the past and how does that continue now?

**Alyssa:** Oh gosh. You mean like accusing people of literal... I mean, sometimes it's actually accusing people of having sex with them. That's one of the major things that the Inquisitors do.

**Alie:** Really?

**Alyssa:** Oh yeah.

**Alie:** Well, I mean, with six dicks...

**Alyssa:** Yeah, it's not supposed to be fun, right? God, the Inquisitors, the stuff that they write, it's very, very detailed. Which is one of the interesting things.

**Alie:** [*laughs*] It's porn. It's demon porn.

**Alyssa:** It is actually, and they talk a lot about demon penises. It's a fascination with the Inquisitors. So, you know, it's supposed to be often, as I said, lots of lots of dicks. [*"So many."*] But also, like, spiked.

**Alie:** Like, barbed ones? [*gasps in horror*]

**Alyssa:** Yeah, yeah. [*"Yowch."*]

**Aside:** Demons. Not only horned, but also horned. I asked Alyssa about horns and the intersection of religious fear and antisemitism. Moses is famously depicted by Michelangelo as having horns. So, what in the fiery depths of Chez Hades Hell is that all about?

**Alyssa:** And the whole Moses thing. Moses being depicted with horns, particularly. All of that, it's so weird how this happens. That in particular is a mistranslation of words. What does it say about Moses? It's that he's got rays of light coming out of his head in one particular biblical verse. And somewhere, it might be King James version, I'm not sure, when that gets translated into horns coming out of his head.

**Alie:** Oh, no. Oh boy.

**Alyssa:** Yeah. So, you do get a lot of those overlaps, but usually, it's down to some horribly mistranslated something or another that people then run with.

**Alie:** Oh, god. That is awful.

**Alyssa:** Yeah. It is.

**Alie:** "You had one job!" No one was proofing that??

**Alyssa:** Right. No. I know, right? It happens over and over again.

**Alie:** Oh man. So, anyone who has like religious-based political leanings, who knows, you might be working from like, a smeared manuscript.

**Alyssa:** Oh, exactly. Yes, yes.

**Alie:** That's terrifying.

**Alyssa:** It is! Well, think about how boring it must have been to be recopying all of these texts. So, the people who had to do that, sometimes I wonder if they really just decided to screw around with stuff because they were bored.

**Alie:** Bored, horny monks just being like, "Who's the demon now, bitches? I just mistranslated something! It will persist for eons."

**Alyssa:** Exactly. And they make all these little drawings in the margins that are really crazy. So, I think a lot of it maybe came in from, yeah, just bored medieval monks.

**Aside:** Also, I wondered if some of those celibate religious folks ever wished they could just make out with someone, and if that ever came out in their work. Because they get reeeel detailed.

**Alyssa:** One of the big proofs they're looking for, with both male and female witches, is that they are having sex with demons, not just that they're talking to them. They're actually having some sort of physical interaction with them. And it's essentially the most physical you can get with something, right? So especially if you're talking about multiple penetrations, that's pretty intimate with a demon.

**Alie:** How do they explain that there aren't a bunch of demon babies around?

**Alyssa:** Oh, there are. Sort of. [*Alie gasps*] Okay, so this is how it works. There's male demons and there's female demons, at least in the Inquisition period. And the way that they breed is that, essentially, the female demons have sex with men. Usually the female demons are on top, that's how it works. And they take the sperm into their bodies, and then they transmit it to the male demons and the male demons can impregnate women, but it's actually with human sperm and not demonic sperm.

**Aside:** I mean, that's just science. Am I right?

**Alie:** Oh my god. So, it kind of gets passed around like a baton in a relay race.

**Alyssa:** Yes. Yes. Exactly. Yes. Racing sperm.

**Alie:** And then a human female has it, and then she has a demon baby because it's human sperm that's passed through at least two demons.

**Alyssa:** Exactly, yeah. So, it's not really physically a demon baby, but it was caused by a demon.

**Aside:** Cursed and haunted zygotes, guaranteed to pass through at least two organic demons before implantation.

**Alie:** Did you ever see *Rosemary's Baby*?

**Alyssa:** I did, yes.

**Alie:** Is that how medieval demon babies were described? Or was it different?

**Alyssa:** In the end when she has it, it's actually, like, scary demonic looking, right?

**Alie:** I think so. Yeah.

**Alyssa:** Yeah.

[*clip from Rosemary's Baby*]

*Rosemary: What have you done to its eyes?!*

*Roman: He has his father's eyes.*

*Rosemary: What are you talking about? Guy's eyes are normal. What have you done to him, you maniac?*

*Roman: Satan is his father, not Guy. He came up from Hell and begat a son of mortal woman.*

*Satanist: Hail Satan!*

**Aside:** Alyssa says medieval demon babies were just more run-of-the-mill lookin'.

**Alyssa:** No, these end up just looking like normal babies. And that's also part of the fear, is that you never really know, because it just looks like a normal human. Anyone could have been product of this kind of bizarre, multiple union. You can't tell the offspring of this kind of union just by looking at them.

**Alie:** Are they jerks?

**Alyssa:** Demons?

**Alie:** Demon babies.

**Alyssa:** Oh... I was gonna say all babies. *[both laugh]*

**Alie:** They do cry and they shit on you.

**Alyssa:** Yes. Yes.

**Alie:** They bite your boobs.

**Alyssa:** Yeah. So, I don't think any more than the normal babies. *[ba-dum-TSH!]*

**Aside:** Colic? *[deep and distorted]* Demon baby-by. Doesn't sleep through the night? *[deep and distorted]* Demon baby-by. Babbling in tongues? *[deep and distorted]* That's a demon-n baby-by.

**Alie:** What is the biggest demon flimflam that you want to debunk? What some real bullshit horsepucky that you're like, "That's not what demonology is about."?

**Alyssa:** *[whistles, then sighs]* I think it's probably the idea that... and this might just go for religious studies in general, since that's my field. We're not all sitting around practicing whatever we're teaching, right? You have no idea how many times, especially with students who take our classes, people think that they're going to be indoctrinated into something. And it's sad, because in some ways it really stops people from taking those sorts of courses. And I think they're really useful just for understanding different cultures. So, I guess that would be my major thing.

**Alie:** Is that you're not going to walk out of here with demonic powers, or speaking in tongues.

**Alyssa:** Right. Yes. I'm not going to teach you spells. We're not going to have the goat sacrifice practicum at the end of class. Yeah, that would be my major thing.

**Alie:** Can I ask you questions from listeners? There's so many.

**Alyssa:** Of course, yeah.

**Aside:** Okay, so before we ask questions from patrons, and there are so many, a quick break to tell you about the sponsors of the show who make it possible for us to donate to a charity of the Ologist's choosing each week. And this week, Alyssa wanted her donation to be split between Doctors Without Borders, that facilitates global first responders to emergencies, epidemics, and natural disasters, and provides medical relief in conflict

zones. And the other donation went to Planned Parenthood, which is a nonprofit organization that provides sexual healthcare in the United States and globally. So, links to both of those and to these sponsors will be in the show notes.

[Ad Break]

[demonic filter] Okay let's get back to your questions.

**Alie:** Okay. We can just do this like a lightning round. We'll get through as many as we can.

**Alyssa:** Okay. All right.

**Alie:** So many good questions. Mary Rose B. says: Pumped! For! This! She says: What famous demon cases do you think are true, if any?

**Alyssa:** Ooh, like actual possession. Ah, that's that split-brain thing again.

**Alie:** Yeah.

**Alyssa:** Yeah. I mean, I want to take people at their word when they say that they're possessed. ["I believe you."] And then my scientific brain is back here going, "No, no!" ["I don't believe you."] So, I'm not sure about that one, actually. I don't know how I would answer that.

I think *Exorcism of Emily Rose* is supposed to be based on a true story, and I would love to dive more into that actual story. But then again, 'based on a true story', we never know what that means in movies, right?

**Alie:** Exactly.

**Aside:** P.S. I was unfamiliar with this tale, and *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* was based on the story of Anneliese Michel, who was a woman who had epilepsy and psychiatric illnesses that just didn't respond to treatment. And so, she and her family became convinced it was a possession. So, she endured a year of exorcism rites in the mid-1970s, and in the process she stopped eating, and she died of starvation. And she had shattered kneecaps from kneeling so much. There's just nothing not awful about what she and her family went through.

Her parents and a priest were found guilty of negligent homicide because of what she went through. And I just want to say, big thanks to anyone studying how the brain works. That would've saved a lot of people a lot of demonic suspicions. The more we know about how our brainmeats work, the better off we all are. This next question was also asked, by the way, by Kathleen Sachs.

**Alie:** Chris Paules wants to know: How many names does Satan/Lucifer/Mephistopheles have throughout history? So many, so much branding.

**Alyssa:** There is, but a lot of it is also mistranslation. So yeah, there are a lot of different names that come from these various sources. So, Lucifer goes back to that idea of light, in the Greco-Roman pantheon. There are a lot of different names that come out of different authors. Lucifer doesn't get popular I think until, like, Milton or Dante, one or the other. I can never remember which.

**Aside:** P.S. Milton is the poet John Milton, who penned an epically long poem called *Paradise Lost*, and it was about Adam and Eve and the fallen angel Satan. It was published in... 166...7. Myah, so close! So close. You know his publicist must have been so pissed. Like, "One year earlier, man!" Would've been good marketing. But yes, some folks wrap up

all the names for Satan into one guy, kind of like how I call my dog Gremlin or Gremmylin, or Grems, or Gremmie, or Monkey Butt, or Monkey Face, or Meat Beast, or Poochie, or Rumplesnuggles, et cetera. Satan, I feel like, probably loves nicknames.

Now, some authors think though, that there are seven distinct princes of Hell. Like, in the late 1500s, Peter Binsfeld thought each prince of Hell represented their own sin. Lucifer was pride; Mammon was greed; Asmodeus, lust; Leviathan, envy; Beelzebub was gluttony; Satan was wrath; and Belphegor, good ol' Belphegor, was sloth. So, you havin' a real lazy day? Belphegor made ya do it!

Now, who asked about the show *Supernatural*? Quite a few of you have been watching it, including Samantha J Guenther, Lauren Harter, Caitlin Fitz Gerald, and Giannina Rokvic.

**Alie:** A lot of people, including Lauren Harter, Samantha, and Riley McInnis asked about the *Supernatural* show. And Lauren says: I watched more seasons of *Supernatural* than I want to admit, and I'd love to know how they did it with all the various and sundry demons and monsters from different cultures. So where are they getting all of the demons for *Supernatural*?

**Alyssa:** Okay. I have a confession to make, [*Alie gasps*] which is that I have not watched *Supernatural*. [*Alie sputters in shock*] I know! Everybody asks me this. I don't know why I never got into it. I watched, like, the first episode and just said, "Eh."

**Alie:** Oh, okay.

**Alyssa:** I know, I know. I feel really bad about that. So, I'm sorry to all of the listeners who wanted to know that. Um, yeah, I think I stopped with *Buffy* and that ages me. So, yeah.

**Alie:** Some people asked about *Buffy*, actually.

**Alyssa:** Oh, that's good. Yay *Buffy*.

**Alie:** Lara Durgavich says: Everything I know about demons I learned from *Buffy/Angel*. Which demons in the Whedonverse are recognizably drawn from known sources and which ones are totally original?

**Alyssa:** Oh, I think he's really good at doing his research, actually.

**Alie:** Yeah?

**Alyssa:** Yeah. So, I would say that most of the demons in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* have some source, historically. I mean, he gets creative with them. He certainly turned them into lounge singers and things like that. [*clip from Angel: Lorne, singing, "First I was afraid, I was petrified..."*] But I think he's done his research. I really do. And I think when it comes down to the shows like *Buffy* and *Angel*, he's done his research, so I would say most of them are historical.

**Alie:** Oh, nice. I feel like in some ways it gives you more cred if they're historical and also you probably have to do less work, so, double bonus.

**Alyssa:** Exactly. Yes.

**Aside:** Also, I had to stop and ask myself, is Joss Whedon a demon? I have bad feelings about him. And yes, I googled it, and in an open letter in 2017, his former wife laid bare quite a bit of deceit and infidelity on his part, so what's his excuse? Was he possessed or just a successful dude in Hollywood being gross? I'm thinkin' it's the latter.

Now, speaking of possession, the following folks wanted to know more about it, including first-time question-asker Rachel Hartley, Euan Munro, Lacy Knecht, Ducksfloat, Ryen&Jazmin, first-time question-asker Megan Bourassa, Jennifer Downey, Amanda Longo, Lexi Reitz, Michael Sherman, Celeste Lewis, Alexandra Martinova, Joe Porfido, Emily Deach, and Sarah.

**Alie:** So, Aarika wants to know: What the heck is actually going on in reported instances of demon possession?

**Alyssa:** Hmm. [sighs] Okay, scientific brain first. Something psychologically unresolved, maybe? My religious studies brain wants to say, whatever demon or god they think is possessing them. I don't want to necessarily write it off as being fake, at least from the perspective of how that person is interacting with their own world, you know? Again, the religious studies side of me says, whatever that person tells you is going on is what is actually going on, you know, that we have to take them seriously about it. And then yeah, scientific brain in the back is saying, "They're not really possessed." But I don't know.

**Aside:** Okay side note, there are scientific papers aplenty describing medical conditions like Tourette syndrome, epilepsy, encephalitis or brain inflammation, dissociative identity disorder, schizophrenia, and psychosis, that would to some look like demonic possession. In a 2014 article that ran in *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* titled, "A village possessed by 'witches': a mixed-methods case-control study of possession and common mental disorders in rural Nepal," researchers in this found that, "Possessed women reported higher rates of traumatic events and higher levels of symptoms of mental disorder compared to non-possessed women." So, more anxiety, depression, and PTSD.

Some researchers think that the process of letting a "spirit" or a "demon" act out through you gives an outlet for distress. So, a way to express the pain of mental illness, or sociopolitical violence, or past trauma or oppression. Not unlike our sloth being blamed on Belphegor, a demon can throw things and express anger and pain in a way that the possessed aren't usually allowed to in their regular life. So, of course, we're still learning how the brain works and who the actual hell knows what the future will unfold about, like, vaping or staring at cell phones. Who knows what our brains are going through?

**Alie:** Several people asked what's up with pentagrams. That has something to do with demons, right?

**Alyssa:** It does. Pentagram, it has a lot of different symbolic uses throughout history. So, you can see them all over in Greco-Roman art and they're not evil. They're not associated with anything satanic, because Greco-Romans don't believe in the idea of Satan. Greco-Romans, as though that's a group- *Greeks and Romans* didn't believe in that sort of concept. You start to see it as a kind of reversed symbol. So, sort of like when you flip a cross upside down, it becomes a symbol of evil, right? The same thing sort of happens with the idea of the pentagram. It's usually with the point down if you see it in films about satanic cults and things like that. Traditionally the right side up pentagram wouldn't have been a negative symbol. It's only when it's reversed that it becomes satanic.

It's usually good luck, the right side up one. And modern-day Wicca, obviously, uses the pentagram as a symbol as well, and it's certainly not satanic and certainly not evil. So maybe that's one of the misconceptions that I should be clearing up right now, is that witches don't worship Satan. Wiccans aren't into that at all. You see the same thing with the swastika. The swastika in Ancient India is an extraordinarily positive symbol, good

luck symbol, and what you see in Nazi Germany is the reversal of that symbol into the swastika. And it obviously takes on completely different connotations.

**Alie:** And do you think that also plays into this psychological binary that we use to cope with what is good and what is evil? Like, do we need to take something and flip it completely on its head, take some idea of a loving God and then switch it into some guy who lives in the depths of Hell that wants to boil our balls and stuff?

**Alyssa:** Oh, for sure. Yes. And if you have an all-powerful God, that gets super scary too. Because if you have an all-powerful God, and this is kind of a classic theological question, why are bad things still happening to us? So, we have to come up with some sort of powerful evil to explain that. Otherwise it all has to be God. And nobody's really good with that. Nobody wants to think that God is doing all of this bad stuff. So, we have to come up with some kind of reversal of powers there and then you reverse the symbols.

**Alie:** It's like, "God wouldn't let me trip, but obviously I've been done by a trickster."

**Alyssa:** Exactly. Yeah. Yeah.

**Alie:** A lot of people; Laura Stacey, Nikki Finger and Nadav Levintov asked about 666 being the number of the beast and why?

**Alyssa:** I should know that.

**Alie:** I don't know.

**Alyssa:** No, I-- Yeah, I should know that and I do not know that.

**Alie:** I'll look it up.

**Alyssa:** Yeah, good. Let me know.

**Alie:** Just think of how many properties are undervalued because they have 666 in the address.

**Alyssa:** Exactly.

**Aside:** As long as we're just tossing numbers around, how about Revelations 13:15-18, which reads: *[as if coming through an old radio speaker]*

*Here is wisdom: Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is six hundred three score and six.*

Other scholars are like, *[skeptical sound]* "I think that translation is off. Maybe your math is wrong and it's supposed to be 616." Oops. Everyone in Grand Rapids, you just skirted maybe having the area code of the beast. But no one's scared of 616 like they are of 666. No one with 616 addresses is scrambling with the county to change their mailbox numbers like one couple in Spring Lake Park, Minnesota, who recently had to fork over about \$100 in fees to change their address, saying they weren't superstitious, but it was just hard to get plumbers and electricians out.

And the perhaps accursed 666 5th Avenue in Manhattan, which was purchased in what ended up being a terrible decision by Trump in-law Jared Kushner, is about to get a makeover that includes new windows and an address change, while still remaining neatly wedged at 52nd and 53rd between a church and a Victoria's Secret. Ooh. Perhaps that might inspire someone to write a sequel to *Rosemary's Baby*.

**Alie:** Joshua Horton wants to know: Where does the legend that you should sell your soul to a demon at a crossroads come from?

**Alyssa:** Oh, crossroads. If you think back into Greco-Roman mythology, I know, I keep bringing that up.

**Alie:** No, it has a huge place.

**Alyssa:** Yeah. It's definitely the site of power, crossroads of all kinds, a site of power. So, I assume, again, it's one of those, a fear of particular sites of power. They're not necessarily evil, but it's sort of like the liminal space between worlds at the crossroads.

**Alie:** What you're afraid of, you might encounter?

**Alyssa:** It's not necessarily evil power, it's power period. If people see something like a crossroads or that type of space as being just innately powerful, it could end up being something scary. So, we're going to develop stories out of that being the place in the world where, to put it strangely, the veil is thin, so to speak. Sort of like on Halloween. The veil between worlds is thin.

**Alie:** And do you feel like in your work Halloween is kind of a busier time for you because we're all in that spirit, if you will?

**Alyssa:** Oh yeah. It's always fun. Especially in the religion classes when Halloween rolls around. And I always want to dress up and go into class and I never do. *[Alie laughs]* So, I really should. It's definitely a fun time of the year. It's probably my favorite holiday, still.

**Alie:** Do you give extra credit for people who dress as historical demons?

**Alyssa:** *[laughing]* I should! I'll tell my students that you suggested that.

**Alie:** *[laughing]* If you had to dress as a demon in history, what would you go as?

**Alyssa:** What demon would I dress as? The only one I've ever dressed as, and it's not really demonic, I did the classic devil with a blue dress one Halloween.

**Alie:** Ohhh, that's amazing.

**Alyssa:** Yeah, it's a really easy costume though. I was just being super lazy. *[clip from Mitch Ryder & The Detroit Wheels song: "Devil with a blue dress on..."]*

**Aside:** So many people asked about demons across various cultures, and I'm going to say your names with my mouth so fast. Matt & Karine Dalton, Becky Woodruff, Hadley, Sarah Jean Horwitz, Rosie Crockett, Cassy Flint, Henna N, Thea Ellen, Andi Schuster, Anna Thompson, Julia, Skulligan, Liz Johanson, Jeffrey Katz, Sydney Brown, Donald McLeod, Rot, Lani Bouwer, Leanna Shuster, Meghan, Jessica Tubesing, Jessie Cole, Meghan, Emmanuel Sanchez, Maia Raimon, Josie Gombas, David M Williams, Clark Bennett, Maria Delgado Gomez, Shea Goddard, Kathleen Sachs, Katie Noll, Enrique I. C. Sarmiento, Ryan Clark, Katherine Finney, Alex Ellison, Marissa Knoll - whew! - and Canon Purdy, who asked:

**Alie:** What are some differences between demons across cultures? As in Japanese demons and devils versus Christian demons versus pagan? How do we see those across a lot of different cultures?

**Alyssa:** Some of them are positive, and I think that's the main distinction, that some of them are really positive creatures even though they might still get called demons. We have such a negative association with that word in the English language, much like we do with the term possession, but in other cultures, again, they're spirit beings. And they can be scary. I mean, they can be scary as all hell, but they're only scary towards evil people. So, they're much more protective than they are attacking good people.

So, I think that's the major distinction still across cultures, is that demons aren't always bad. Like Thailand, and in Japan, you get these protective figures that we would really perceive as being demons, because of how they look. And they almost would look like our classic idea of what a demonic presence would be, but they're protective.

**Aside:** So, it's like a cool goat-bitch having your back. Also, a few of you had sleep paralysis questions. And we do talk about this in the Somnology episode with Dr. Chris Winter, but for this one, E. Kristin Anderson, Bruce R. Cordell, Rachel Weiss, Katie Noll, and Skulligan all asked:

**Alie:** About sleep paralysis and about how that was considered to be a demon sitting on your chest, but we know a little bit better now. Are there other ways in which demons have been implicated in ancient or medieval medicine? Folks want to know.

**Alyssa:** Yes. So, crib death for sure. Again, going back to babies. It was often... if you had somebody dying unexpectedly, and particularly if children died unexpectedly, that would get attributed to demons. In some cases, what we would think of today as sexually transmitted diseases, you could link those to demons as well. Infertility, for sure, and male impotency. Yep, always blame male impotency on demons, right? It's not my fault. It's that demon over there that did it to me.

**Aside:** [*in the voice of an old crone*] Ye olde demon makes alcoholic dick trickery; i.e., probably just drank too much mead.

**Alyssa:** So yeah, a lot of medical stuff got sort of put on the shoulders of demons so that people didn't have to deal with it themselves.

**Alie:** [*gasps sympathetically*] I have to say, Viagra does sound like a Greek goddess.

**Alyssa:** It does, doesn't it? Yeah. You wonder why the Inquisitors were so interested in writing about this stuff, too. I guess we don't have to wonder that much, but yeah, they were very concerned with sexuality, so...

**Alie:** Well, I understand that *50 Shades of Grey* started out as *Twilight* fanfic, so it's all related.

**Alyssa:** Yes! I know! Yeah, yeah.

**Alie:** Let's see, JuliansMom16 asked: Is there a certain kind of person or emotional state that demons prey on?

**Alyssa:** If demons are real, then I would feel like they would prey on, oh my gosh, I guess people who were having a really difficult time in their lives? That would make sense. I would think that would open them up to some kind of demonic presence, if people are looking for some kind of power in their lives.

**Alie:** Maybe something like depression is almost a thinning of the veil between darkness and light.

**Alyssa:** Right, right.

**Alie:** So, I don't know, maybe demons are like, "Hmm, he's bummed out, I'm going to go fuck with him."

**Alyssa:** Exactly. Yes.

**Alie:** Interesting. What an asshole.

**Alyssa:** Yeah.

**Alie:** A few people including RJ Doidge asks: Where did “God bless you” actually originate? What is the flimflam about the devil and sneezing?

**Alyssa:** There was a fear in a lot of cultures that sneezing allows your soul to get out of your body. So, all of the different sort of, ‘God bless you’, and *gesundheit*, and all of that sort of thing, it was supposed to be almost a countermeasure to that.

**Alie:** Protection. Like, “Keep it in there!”

**Alyssa:** Exactly.

**Alie:** And also keep your snot off of me.

**Aside:** A few people had questions about famous demonologists Ed and Lorraine Warren, including Juan Pedro Martinez and...

**Alie:** Erin Becker wants to know: How do you feel about Ed and Lorraine Warren, who were kind of famed demonologists?

**Alyssa:** [*deep sigh*] Yeah. I don’t know. It’s sort of like watching *Ancient Aliens*, right? It’s fun for a while. But, I don’t know. I don’t really have much of an opinion on professional demonologists. [*“I don’t know her!”*] I want to study them, I guess.

**Alie:** Sure. I mean, you study the people who study demons, which makes sense.

**Alyssa:** Exactly. Yeah.

**Alie:** Greg Walloch has a great question: Are personal demons the scariest of all?

**Alyssa:** Of course, right? Yeah, and I think it has a lot to do with how we depict these sorts of things. Cross-culturally, it really does come down to, we’re trying to make our fears things that we can deal with a lot of the time. And even putting that into a super scary form with horns, and big red muscly bodies, and all of that, [*“Hello.”*] it allows us to sort of confront it in a way that we can’t when we just keep it internal. So, it’s like demon is therapy, maybe.

**Alie:** That makes sense. Danelle Von says: I’ve read that the Vatican has an exorcism division and that they legit have trouble with people willing to do this job. Is that a real thing?

**Alyssa:** I believe it came back in about a decade ago. Yes.

**Alie:** Oh, god.

**Alyssa:** So, for a while I think the church had sort of debunked the whole idea of exorcisms and possession, but I think it’s actually, there is now a division. But it’s relatively recent that it’s come back into vogue, so to speak.

**Aside:** I guess now that the Pope is on Twitter, you could always just ask him about it.

**Alie:** Jessica Lou wants to know: What is the worst demon horror movie you have ever seen?

**Alyssa:** Oh gosh. I was just thinking of this the other day, *The Prince of Darkness*.

**Alie:** Okay.

**Alyssa:** It’s really old - well, not really old. It’s like the ‘80s. Late ‘80s horror movie. It’s wonderful and horrible at the same time. It’s all around this concept of a corrupt priesthood - surprise, surprise - called the Brotherhood of Sleep, and they’re keeping Satan in this sort of Tupperware jar kind of thing. And it, obviously, finally breaks free.

**Aside:** I looked this up, and it’s a lot of gooey special effects makeup and people vomiting garden hoses of water on each other. Oh, oh, and the cameos.

**Alyssa:** Famously, Alice Cooper has a role in it.

**Alie:** Oh, god.

**Alyssa:** It's wonderful. So yeah. *Prince of Darkness*, if you haven't seen that one, watch that one.

**Alie:** Okay. A few people had questions about D&D.

**Aside:** This dungeony, dragony question was also asked by Beren and Dionne Dabelow.

**Alie:** James Hales wants to know: How accurate are the D&D *Monster Manuals*, in regard to demons?

**Alyssa:** I still have one sitting behind me right now. [*Alie laughs delightedly*] I do. They're great. No, they really are. That's another group of people who did their research really well. A lot of them are based on either demigods or all sorts of things from other mythologies. So, *Monster Manual* is a good way to go, especially if you are trying to write a story or write a film. And I love it. I mean, just the different powers that they all get, it's so great. The minds that created those things are wonderful.

**Aside:** On the topic of books:

**Alie:** Mandii Smith has a question: Are there any good books where I can learn about different demon/witchy/etc., symbols? Mandii says: I've been watching a lot of *Supernatural*, just really want to learn about them. But, other than taking your course, I mean--

**Alyssa:** Right.

**Alie:** People could always just go to school.

**Alyssa:** Yes. There are lot. I mean, it depends on the period that you're interested in. Obviously, I love the medieval period for this stuff. There is a fantastic book if you're really interested in how it went down. You know how you have, like, academic crushes sometimes on particular authors? All of this started when I read one particular book called, *Demon Lovers*, by a guy named Walter Stephens. It's just a brilliant book. And it's really detailed and his research is fantastic, but he writes so well. So that would be one of my suggestions. It's not overly academic. I mean, it's very academic but it's so well written that you don't really notice it. So, *Demon Lovers*: excellent.

**Alie:** Vince Alasha and a few others wanted to know: What is your opinion on ghost hunting and demon hunting reality shows? And can we trust them?

**Alyssa:** I love them.

**Alie:** Oh, you love them?!

**Alyssa:** I love them. Yeah. I love watching them, and my husband mocks me for it, because again, I don't believe in ghosts. But then I sit there watching *Ghost Hunters*. Makes no sense. I've never seen them show anything that proves it to me. But I for some reason obviously still enjoy the shows.

**Alie:** Because they structure it, too, where you have to watch after the commercial break.

**Alyssa:** Oh, for sure.

**Alie:** That's how they get ya.

**Alyssa:** Of course, yeah.

**Aside:** [*clip from Ghost Hunters: Mechanical beeping sound. Urgent voice, "This is going off," followed by dramatic commercial break noise*]

**Alie:** What is your least favorite thing about studying demonology? What sucks? Is it grading papers? Is it manuscript microfiche? What's something that just sucks about the field or about demons?

**Alyssa:** Well, yeah, nobody likes grading papers. I have never met a professor who enjoys grading papers, that's for sure. I think probably some of the misunderstandings, like I said, about the field, that's a problem. I've had students end up on prayer circles because they were taking my classes. I've had students get threatening emails because they were taking my classes. Yeah, so there's a lot of misunderstanding out there about that. So probably one, grading papers. Two, you are never going to make money being in religious studies, ever. [*Alie chuckles*] But the misunderstanding is probably the big thing.

**Alie:** And what is your favorite thing about your study of demons? What do you love the most?

**Alyssa:** [*sighs deeply*] It's how it can tie into so much other stuff. So, I love traveling. Like, I have a real problem with travel. I want to constantly be traveling. And this ties into it perfectly because like I said, you look at the Thai demons and they're so completely different from the Japanese stuff, from the ancient Greco-Roman things. So, every culture you go into, you can find something about this. And so that's really what's fun for me, is that I can tie all of this together and have a good time doing it.

**Alie:** When you're traveling, do you ever have to worry about demons trying to hide your passport before you leave and giving you diarrhea?

**Alyssa:** [*laughs*] Yes, I'm such a freak about my passport. I always know exactly where it is. And it's usually in my purse, just in case I need to, sort of, make a break for it.

**Alie:** Yeah?

**Alyssa:** A constant joke that every time we drive past an airport, I'm sort of nudging my husband like, "Let's just go, we don't have to go to Thanksgiving dinner. Let's just go do something else." So, yes.

**Alie:** I love that you're just ready to jam at any moment.

**Alyssa:** Oh, totally. Yes. In fact, I usually keep a little backpack of a change of clothes and stuff in the car just in case I get to take off somewhere.

**Alie:** The travel demon possessed you!

**Alyssa:** I know! It has, it has.

**Alie:** Thank you so much for doing this. I'm less afraid of demons actually.

**Alyssa:** Oh good.

**Alie:** Not that I was really scared. But now I just feel like they just want to watch me trip and fall. And they're all also in my own head.

**Alyssa:** Yes, yes. And you can just, you know, go get a little statue of one of the cute Thai rainbow demons and keep that and it'll protect you.

**Alie:** I love them.

**Alyssa:** Yeah.

**Alie:** Thank you so much for doing this. Have a safe Halloween.

**Alyssa:** Thank you, Alie. You too.

**Alie:** This has been awesome.

-----

So, ask smart scholars stupid, spooky questions, because they are just treasure troves of lore. Now, there are tons of links in the show notes, and up at [AlieWard.com/Ologies/Demonology](http://AlieWard.com/Ologies/Demonology). And to follow Dr. Alyssa Beall, she's [@Alyssa.Beall](https://www.instagram.com/Alyssa.Beall) on Instagram. We are @Ologies on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/Ologies) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/Ologies). I'm [@AlieWard](https://www.instagram.com/AlieWard), on [both](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...), so do follow along there. *Ologies* merch is available at [OlogiesMerch.com](http://OlogiesMerch.com).

Thank you, Shannon Feltus and Boni Dutch of the podcast *You Are That* for managing that, and thank you Erin Talbert and Hannah Lipow for adminning the [Facebook Ologies Podcast group](https://www.facebook.com/OlogiesPodcastGroup). Thank you to Emily White and all of the *Ologies* transcribers who are making transcripts available. You can go to [AlieWard.com/Ologies-Extras](http://AlieWard.com/Ologies-Extras) for those. I'll pop that link in the show notes. And you can join that [Facebook group of transcribers](https://www.facebook.com/OlogiesTranscribers) if you want to help make transcripts available. You can also search the transcripts on the site if you're looking for particular passages you want to remember.

Thank you also to devilishly handsome assistant editor Jarrett Sleeper, for helping me with some spooooky research, and driving like 15 of the 16 hours on this weekend's road trip to see my family. You are the best. Thank you to the always-wonderful Steven Ray Morris, for pulling all the pieces together each week, and to Nick Thorburn who wrote and performed the theme music.

And if you listen all the way to the end, you know I tell you a secret each week. And this week is that I've never seen *The Omen* or *The Exorcist*, and they are both so terrifying, but honestly, it's the barfing in *The Exorcist* that I'm most afraid of. That seems like it would just really stick with you, man. I feel like I saw just a millisecond of a clip, and I'm like, [*disgusted*] "That's enough. That's enough of that." Also, I'm just gonna be very honest. I'm hella happy to be finishing this episode, because after working on it late last night, getting ass-deep in demon trivia, I had nothing but a horror show of L.A. traffic getting to the airport this morning, at like five in the morning, it was tons of traffic. My *Lyft* driver got lost. I had to run through TSA. My shoes alarmed, I had to throw my shoe on the belt, it fell behind the x-ray machine, and all the TSA people were like, "Sucks to be you, man."

So, then I had to run through LAX with no shoes. I just ditched that shoe, like a very haggard, bleary-eyed, sad Cinderella. I just left a shoe. I didn't have any other shoes in my luggage. So, then I just ran in socks all the way through the American terminal. I finally got to my gate, and they were like, "We can't let you on a plane without shoes, you freak." And I was like, "Whatever, I'll buy shoes when I get to Boston." So then, my producer luckily had tossed an extra pair of shoes in her bag. I put on her shoes - thank you Stephanie, thank you Karly. You're both the best. I made it on the flight, but I'm still hoarse from panting, and I'm just saying, I'm over this demon shit. You guys, I'm sorry demons, I hope we're all good now. I'm gonna burn a cinnamon stick or something. And I really just hope that George Clooney doesn't try to pull any shit on me either, for that matter, too. Okay buddy? All right.

[*deep and distorted*] Okay, berbye.

*Transcribed by Hannah Dent, NC – that gal who spent years studying plants but honestly can't tell you why your houseplant's leaves are turning brown or how to fix it, so please don't ask.*

*Edits by Kaydee Coast, who reminds you don't lick toads, check your crevices, milk your thumbs, and never apologize for asking questions. Kthxbi.*

Some links you may find of use:

[Dr. Beall's CV](#)

[Oldest demon artifact?](#)

[Greek Underworld aka Chez Hades](#)

["Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex and the Crisis of Belief"](#) book by Walter Stevens

["The Golden Compass"](#) book by Philip Pullman

["Prince of Darkness"](#) movie

Clip from ["Rosemary's Baby"](#)

[George Clooney loves turd pranks!](#)

[George Clooney "might get arrested" clip](#)

[Why people believed in vampires](#)

[How long have we believed in vampires?](#)

[Advice on how to speak in tongues](#)

[666 5th Ave](#)

[Is 666 5th Ave cursed?](#)

[Lucifer painting in the Vatican](#)

[Daemon vs. Demon](#)

[Inquisition history](#)

["A village possessed by "witches": a mixed-methods case-control study of possession and common mental disorders in rural Nepal"](#)

["Possession and Jinn" study](#)

[Why we sometimes enjoy fear](#)

[Paradise Lost: the John Milton poem](#)

*For comments and enquiries on this or other transcripts, please contact [OlogiteEmily@gmail.com](mailto:OlogiteEmily@gmail.com)*